



Edmonton

February 1996

NEXT MEETING:

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 20, '96

7:30pm

10112 - 124 St

Lower Level

Parking is available behind
Boystown Cafe

We look forward to meeting with both old and new members, especially parents who have questions and concerns about their lesbian, bisexual, transgendered and gay children.

Questions? Comments? Please
phone Lynne [redacted] Cindy
[redacted] or [redacted] VB 3524.

Coffee will be served. Everyone
welcome!

LOOKING BACK:

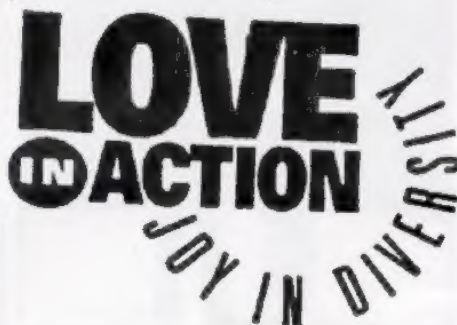
(Jan. '95 - Feb '96):

A PERSPECTIVE FOR '96

With a base of 26 paid-up members PFLAG Edmonton was able to participate in and/or organize the following activities:

Speaking engagements:

- For church groups including those at All Saints Cathedral, St. David's Anglican and Knox United;



- For lesbian and/or gay groups including:

- Gay Men's Outreach Crew - two "Coming Out in the 90's" workshops for gay men were facilitated by PFLAG;

- Prime Timers (a group for gay and bisexual men over 40) PFLAG was one of several gay +ve groups asked to speak on their goals and past and current activities in support of gay and lesbian people:

- "Pink Tank" - a gathering of several of the approximately 40 gay+ve groups in Edmonton to increase awareness of each others' goals and activities, to improve

communication among the groups and to increase the level of networking where mutual goals exist. We were delighted to be invited and participated enthusiastically in this one day event.

- OUTreach, the University of Alberta organization for lesbian, gay and bisexual students. PFLAG was warmly welcomed by this group to speak about our personal experiences as parents of les/bi/gay children.

- For University of Alberta classes in Family Studies 222, a course in human sexuality, PFLAG co-facilitated 3 workshops with Planned Parenthood.

Speakers invited to PFLAG meetings:

- Noreen Marshall, Regional Director of the Human Rights Commission.
- Dr Ian Kroll, psychiatrist, who did a slide presentation overview on homosexuality, its *raison d'être*, and suggestions for handling present day challenges facing parents and their les/bi/gay children.
- Spencer Harrison, an artist who collects and then depicts on large murals the true stories of gay bashing in each city/town that he

visits. Spencer puts his paintings on display in public places to increase the general public's awareness of the reality and violence of the gay bashings - that go mostly unreported in all of our "home towns"!

- Sgt Joe Rogers and Constable Brad MacDonald, officers from the Police Liason Committee, spoke on sensitization of police officers to diversity of sexual orientation and also on a sexual abuse program currently underway at Steele Heights Junior High School - which Brad is extensively involved in.

Support Meetings:

- Held on the third Tuesday of each month, these meetings have been well attended and sometimes "full to the brim". Luckily the Gay and Lesbian Community Centre has moved to more spacious quarters so we have been able to accommodate all those who arrived.

PFLAG Edmonton Newsletter

- This newsletter, published 9 months of the year, goes out to paid members (about 22), several Canadian PFLAG groups and a few American PFLAG chapters. A number of copies are delivered to OUTreach at the university and to the Gay & Lesbian Community Centre where they are accessed by young homosexual people. The response we get, particularly from other PFLAG groups, has been very supportive and encouraging.

PFLAG Education

One of our prime concerns is to educate our youth and to let them know that "Being lesbian or gay is OK!" To this end we have

undertaken the following initiatives:

- Two phone helplines: [REDACTED] Lynne; and [REDACTED] VB 3524. Lynne receives 12 to 15 calls a month though this number is steadily increasing. The new voice box (VB) number is on our high school posters which started going up in schools and public places in January, '96. A few calls have been received so far.

- 200 high school posters, designed by a graphic artist, and featuring 9 lesbian and gay young adults photographed by a professional photographer, came off the presses just before Christmas '95. As of February, '96 48 of these posters have been distributed to public places including Steele Heights Jr. High, Bev Facey Sr High, Salisbury Sr High, Fort Saskatchewan Sr High, Eastwood Jr High, Vegreville Sr. High, Ardrossan Senior High, the six Catholic Social Services offices in Edmonton, Grey Nun's Health Resources Center, Human Resources Office of the Edmonton Police Headquarters, and Leduc High School. Please contact Ellen at [REDACTED] if you wish to put one or more up in your office, school or etc. Thank you!

These posters will also be for sale at the various conferences that PFLAG will be participating in.

- **Conferences** - PFLAG began participating in conferences with display tables and/or workshops in October '95 at the Child Welfare League of Canada's annual conference organized by Catholic Social Services.

Upcoming conferences include:

- Feb 7 - A workshop and display table for foster parents at a

Edmonton

conference organized by Alberta Family and Social Services;

- Feb 29 & Mar 1 - Greater Edmonton Teachers Convention- Our PFLAG display table will focus on the issue of adolescent suicide.

- April 25, '96 - Alberta Coalition for School Health attended by public health nurses, dentists, doctors, and other professionals. PFLAG will be involved with a workshop and/or display table.

- May 8,9 & 10 - The Western Canadian Biennial Conference on Human Sexuality attended by social workers, public health nurses, doctors, etc. PFLAG will be involved, again with a workshop and/ or display table.

- Oct 31& Nov 1, '96 - The Alberta Guidance Counsellors Association will be holding their annual conference in Banff. PFLAG is considering applying to participate.

Volunteers to help at these conferences are most welcome. Phone Ellen at [REDACTED] if you are interested.

Charitable Status:

We hope to be adopting a new constitution in the near future after which Bryson will pursue obtaining charitable status for our group.

Gay Pride Parade:

Several of our members walked in the '95 Gay Pride Parade holding high our new banner donated by Denise. Gail and David from PFLAG Calgary graciously joined us and continued on to the PFLAG picnic which was set up by the rest of our Moms, Dads and Friends. People ask, "Does God love us?" I guess so - the weather has always been great!

Social Events:

- Annual summer BBQ - We were warmly welcomed by the "Iron Lady" on Joan and Isadore's lawn. This 6 foot Victorian lady composed of innumerable lobelia plants set a gay mood for the BBQ.
- Annual Christmas Party - Held at "Buddies", above Boystown Cafe, we had a marvelous view of the surrounding area, exquisitely lit up at night.

Thank you:

- For monetary donations - You know who you are!
- To Jerrett for donating several excellent books to the PFLAG library.
- To our video librarian, Ernie for countless hours of taping, commercial deletions, "splicing", and carpentry.
- To our book librarian, Elsie, for her many excellent book reviews, for "lugging" all those books to each meeting and for advising members on which books might best suit their needs.
- To Dale for his work and purchase of our newest helpline phone number [REDACTED] VB 3524. A message runs 24 hours and callers can talk to a volunteer Monday to Friday, 7:00 to 9:30pm.
- To Graham for his wonderful art work enhancing our convention display table. Your talents and innumerable hours of hard work are a great asset to our group.
- To Terry, Shirley, Lynn, Cindy, Devon, Cam and all others who have spoken at our workshops and meetings with other groups.
- To Cindy for her gracious work as "reluctant" chair and treasurer,

leading two meetings monthly and spending many hours supporting parents, lesbians, bisexuals, gays and transgendered young adults who are valiantly struggling out of the darkness of the closet.

- To Lynne, our helpline hostess for several years who takes time out of a very busy life to advise and support her many callers.
- To all those who attend meetings (either business or support) to further our PFLAG aims of support, education and, when needed, advocacy.

Thanks to all who make PFLAG Edmonton possible. We look forward to many more accomplishments in 1996. **Our kids need us!**

Cindy

EVENTS CALENDAR**A Black & White Affair**

Saturday, February 17

Edmonton's party with a purpose returns as one of the hippest events on the city fundraising circuit. Tickets are \$25 in advance or \$30 at the door. Available at any Ticketmaster outlet or at the AIDS Network offices. Phone [REDACTED] for further information.

Coming Out in the '90s

Six Wednesday evenings

Feb 28 to April 3

7:00pm

St. Stephen's College

8810 - 112 Street

To register call [REDACTED]
Sponsored by GMOC and AIDS Network.

Edmonton**Homophobia in EPSB Schools:****A Discussion of Solutions**

Monday, April 1, '96

7:30pm

10112 - 124 St, Lower Level

Join PFLAG Edmonton and Louise Grisdale of the EPSB as we explore the issue of homophobia in our schools and search together for solutions to situations which have led to lesbian and gay students attempting and completing suicide

Everyone welcome, especially those who may have attended an EPSB school in the last seven years and/or their parents.

Dvorak

Piano Quintet in A major, Op 81

April 14, '96

2:30pm

Wedgewood Room at Hotel McDonald

Enjoy a delightful afternoon of classical music organized by the Alberta Piano Chamber Society. For further info: [REDACTED]

Christ and the Homosexual Person

In place of the usual "It's A Gay Life" article, this month's newsletter, for the first time, addresses the "religious issue" that is of prime concern to a number of parents and their les/bi/gay children. We hope it will be helpful in some measure for those who find this issue a difficult one....

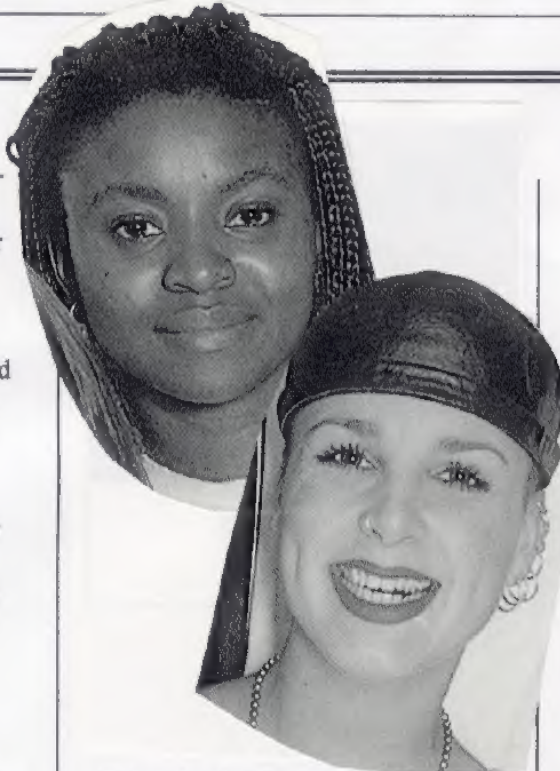
Christ & the Homosexual Person

(Courtesy Times 10 magazine)

Editor's Note: Earlier this summer an Edmonton teenager died of suicide. He was a friend to this editor and to many others. Rob, like many teenagers, faced troubled waters to the best of his ability. A larger issue was on his mind and rather than face family, church community, and Alberta's restrictive, conservative society for being drawn to love persons of their own gender, he chose to take his own life. In the light of the gospel of Jesus and **Christ's example of unconditional love**, the tragedy of lesbian, gay and bisexually oriented youths being driven to contemplate and commit suicide is a moral and religious outrage.

In this article Reverend Bidwell responds to **les-bi-gay teen suicide**. He challenges the religious and community condemnation which is often one of the reasons why homosexually-oriented teenagers choose suicide. For **Christ's sake** please copy this article and pass it on to someone (parent or teenager) who needs to hear this message.

by The Reverend Charles M. Bidwell, PhD; Dean, Samaritan



Education in Canada; Metropolitan Community Churches in Canada.

How would Christ deal with, or be in relationship with, persons who are oriented to love those of their own gender?

Same sex love and relationships are natural and seem to occur in all races and cultures. How these cultures deal with same sex love is a direct result of the social and religious teachings of those in authority. Christians have different responses depending on their denominational views and their personal faith views. Some

Christians condemn, others bless; you must decide where Christ would stand with you to demonstrate God's love.

Where did you get that idea?

In Edmonton (and probably to a greater degree in conservative southern Alberta) there is a vocal segment of society that fears and condemns same sex emotional and spiritual relationships and physical intimacies. These fearful and condemning people are not evil but they are often unloving in their behaviours. It seems to me that they are delighted to discover certain phrases and paragraphs in the Bible that, taken out of context, seem to support their revulsion and convictions. Jesus commented on many aspects of life but he never impressed his followers with any words against loving someone of your own gender. The Bible has as much authority as we give it and it has a gold mine of wisdom that needs to be explored and mined; the nuggets are not sitting on the surface. So we need to take the time to read a passage in context and see with **full vision what overriding message and principle is being conveyed**. Many 20th Century biblical scholars have done their research and have

reported that the Bible does not condemn a loving relationship between any two people. Their evidence is published but suspect that many of the condemning persons are not interested in getting a different view of same sex relationships or of people who are oriented toward their own gender. **Ignorance begets fear** (we are afraid of the unknown or the stranger); and **fear begets anger or hatred**.

And now for something completely different.

How do we change and grow? First we have to be open to change. Then we have to look for opportunities to learn something new. Ignorance begets fear (of the unknown and unfamiliar) so ask and read and increase the chances that the new knowledge will reduce our fear and anxiety.

One of the most effective ways to understand same sex couples is to meet and get to know them.

When condemning people discover that someone they know and love is oriented toward their own gender, the condemning person is often challenged to re-think their stand. The friend (or family member) does not fit their stereotype and their fear is not useful in helping them relate to this person with new insight. Whenever we are tempted to declare that we do not know any homosexually-oriented people, realize how unlikely that really is. The reason why those of our friends and family and co-workers who are homosexually-oriented have never confided that information to us, is that they fear that it will damage their

relationship with us. **Would it?** Could you discover that fact about someone you know and still relate to them as a friend (a parent, a sibling)?



Where's the beef?

Where's the sin? If you look at what Christ condemned and what he supported, you discover that he was more concerned with relationships than laws. The law said stone to death the adulterer; Jesus said let the one who is without sin cast the first stone (it takes two to commit adultery; did the law say that both were to be killed or only the woman?)

If being in a loving relationship with someone of your own gender is a sin then you'll have to show me what harm it does to the relationship (or souls) of the couple. I understand why lying is a sin; it destroys the trust between the liar and the one lied to. Stealing is a sin because it destroys the trust between the thief and the robbed. Rape, any abuse, and harassment is a sin because it destroys the safety and peace in the relationship between the person who abuses their power over the other and the person so used. If being gifted with the ability to intimately love someone of your

own gender is a sinful state, then you will need to show where the harm is to their souls in their loving.

Any sin you can name needs to be supported by the harm it does to the persons directly or indirectly involved. Hatred and bigotry against homosexually-oriented or bisexually-oriented persons is a sin because it causes fear and secrecy and pain between the differently oriented person and the one who condemns them for being who they are.

How many teenagers have killed themselves rather than face life in a family or community that seems to them to condemn who they are and the way they feel; they see no hope for a loving relationship that is natural and vital to them. Whom do you picture Jesus standing with? Where would he see sin and why? What harm is being done to relationships? What love is lost?

I believe that it is not who we love but that we love which counts. As Fred Small's song goes, "The only measure of the life we have lived will be the love we leave behind when we're gone". And in *Les Miserables* they sing that "to love another person is to see the face of God." Regardless of the genders involved, **any relationship must be assessed on the basis of the love and support between the couple.**

In our face:

Because I believe we are taught to fear and hate, I believe that it is the responsibility of churches and parents to stand firmly against bigotry and the abuse of persons who are differently challenged or different in any way from the

people in power. Because the feelings of revulsion at same sex expressions ("You do what?!") is based on what you have been taught is repulsive, rational arguments will do little to change those impressions. But feelings can be changed by allowing ourselves different experiences and knowledge. The ignorance and fear that keeps people hating and bashing lesbian, gay and bisexual persons (when they are discovered or suspected) is a sinful, unloving state for anyone to live in. As more healthy and happy homosexuals and bisexuals reveal themselves to their friends, family members, and co-workers they will be putting a face - a known and loved face - on the fearsome stereotype those people have been taught to believe in. **Coming out is an act of courage; it is also an act of love because it offers the person trapped in fear and hatred a chance to grow and change and be freed from fearing and hating those who are not heterosexually oriented.**

The media are giving people an awareness of homosexuality that wasn't there twenty years ago. Some of it has been positive but all of it keeps people aware that lesbian, gay and bisexual persons are a very present reality. You can't grow up today, as I did, thinking that you are the only one in the world who shares your feelings for those of your gender. Now there are publications, organizations, computer bulletin boards, phone lines, TV and radio programs, and movies that can keep anyone informed and connected.

Christ & the Homosexual Person

A new heaven and a new earth

Change is occurring in every aspect of our lives and within Christianity as well. There are individual Christians,



congregations and whole denominations that have changed their beliefs and teachings and regulations regarding homosexually and bisexually oriented persons in society as well as within their churches.

Metropolitan Community Churches are an international denomination of Christian churches in most major cities. They were founded by a pastor who was evicted from his church because he identified himself with the fight against discrimination of homosexually oriented persons. MCCs everywhere bless same sex couples (as do all Unitarian churches) and most of their pastors are homosexually oriented.

The United Church of Canada (UCC) has changed; it now ordains self-affirming gay and lesbian ministers (like all churches it has always ordained homosexuals but they were never allowed to declare themselves or live in loving same sex relationships). The UCC is moving toward identifying "affirming congregations" who are

comfortable in calling an identified gay or lesbian ordained minister and recognizing their partner as a spouse and not just a friend or housemate.

The Anglicans, Lutherans and other denominations are moving too. Although many cannot yet bring themselves to bless same sex relationships, **they are speaking out against discrimination based on sexual orientation.**

Christ came to give us vision and hope for a new world and new ways of relating to each other. Loving your neighbours doesn't require that you like them; it requires that you wish them the best and work to keep from doing them harm.

We are family

When a gay, lesbian or bisexual teenager ends his/her life rather than face the bigotry and discrimination they see in Alberta, some families need Christ's compassion and correction. Communicate to your children that it is natural for some men to love men and some women to love women and that your concern is that they find someone whom they can love and be loved by regardless of their gender. Use gender neutral terms like life partner to convey that you are comfortable with whomever your child chooses to love.

The struggle for justice and love is eternal. Perhaps it is a life-long struggle toward a new heaven and a new earth; certainly toward a new Alberta or Edmonton or community or family. Grow out, in Christ's unconditional love! **Be blessed and be a blessing to others. Amen.**